

Preventing Identity Theft

THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA DEPARTMENT
OF INSURANCE, SECURITIES AND BANKING



FRAUD
AWARENESS
WEEK

JULY 9-14

INCREASE
AWARENESS,
REDUCE RISK

During National Fraud Awareness Week, the D.C. Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking will bring you resources and information on fraud prevention. This week is one to teach consumers and businesses about recognizing various types of financial-services fraud, how to prevent them, and how to fight against them.

The Government of the District of Columbia Department of Insurance, Securities and Banking (DISB) regulates all financial-service businesses in the District of Columbia. Call (202) 727-8000 or visit its Web site at www.dishb.dc.gov.

HOW IDENTITY THEFT RUINS YOUR LIFE

- Thieves go on spending sprees with your money.
- Thieves can open new credit accounts by using your name and Social Security number.
- They can get cell phone service in your name with your credit history.
- They could even get arrested and give your name to the police.

—Federal Trade Commission

What is identity theft

Identity theft occurs when a person uses your personal information, such as Social Security number and date of birth, with the intent to commit fraud or to aid an unlawful activity. Once personal information is obtained, the person may open new credit card accounts in your name, open bank accounts in your name to write bad checks or take out a loan in your name. **Federal law provides a \$50 liability limit for the fraudulent use of credit cards.** Because of this, most identity theft victims never incur a high amount of direct monetary losses. However, restoring credit and correcting the information is a slow and time-consuming process. Identity theft insurance is one way to help consumers cope.

What can you do to prevent Identity Theft?

Taking steps to protect your

identity is important. Here are some suggestions:

- 1) Avoid carrying your Social Security number and driver's license number together in your wallet.
- 2) Shred all pre-approved credit card offers and bills before disposing of them.
- 3) Avoid putting out-going mail in your home mailbox – place it in a U.S. Postal service mailbox.
- 4) Be careful using credit cards online. Some consumers have a card they use only for online purchases.



Meet Lily Qi. This public information officer with DISB lost her identity several years ago, while vacationing in Europe.

- 5) Check your credit report on a regular basis. If you see unusual activity, you can investigate promptly by contacting the three credit bureaus: **Equifax**: www.equifax.com/1-800-525-6285; **Experian** – www.experian.com/1-888-397-3742; and **TransUnion** – www.transunion.com/1-800-680-7289.

What can you do if you suspect your identity has been stolen?

- 1) Place a "Fraud Alert" on your credit reports and review the reports carefully.
 - 2) Close accounts that have been tampered with, or established fraudulently.
 - 3) File a police report.
 - 4) Report the theft to the U.S. Federal Trade Commission.
- Online:** www.ftc.gov/idtheft
Phone: 1-877-ID-THEFT (438-4338)

EDITORIAL: IDENTITY THEFT IS NO JOKE

Many of us have seen the funny commercials from Citibank's Identity Theft Solutions. The ads show the victims speaking with the voices of the identity thieves, who talk about how much fun they had with the victims' credit cards and bank accounts. The joke is that sometimes there is a man with a woman's voice talking about

buying female products. Although these have grabbed our attention, those are real people on screen whose identities have been stolen. And that is no laughing matter.

According to the Federal Trade Commission, identity theft strikes nearly 10 million U.S. consumers annually (4.6 percent of the population of con-

sumers over the age of 18); and it imposes \$50 billion in unnecessary costs on the nation's businesses every year. These horrific numbers alone are enough for the federal government, and local agencies such as DISB's Enforcement and Investigation Bureau to double their efforts in preventing this crime.